Writing Beyond the University:

Future Directions for Writing Transfer Research and Practice

Julia Bleakney, Heather Lindenman,
Jessie L. Moore, and Paula Rosinski
Elon University

What do we already know about writing transfer (beyond the university)?

Transition:

“The concept we use to understand how knowledge is generalized… across social space and time.”

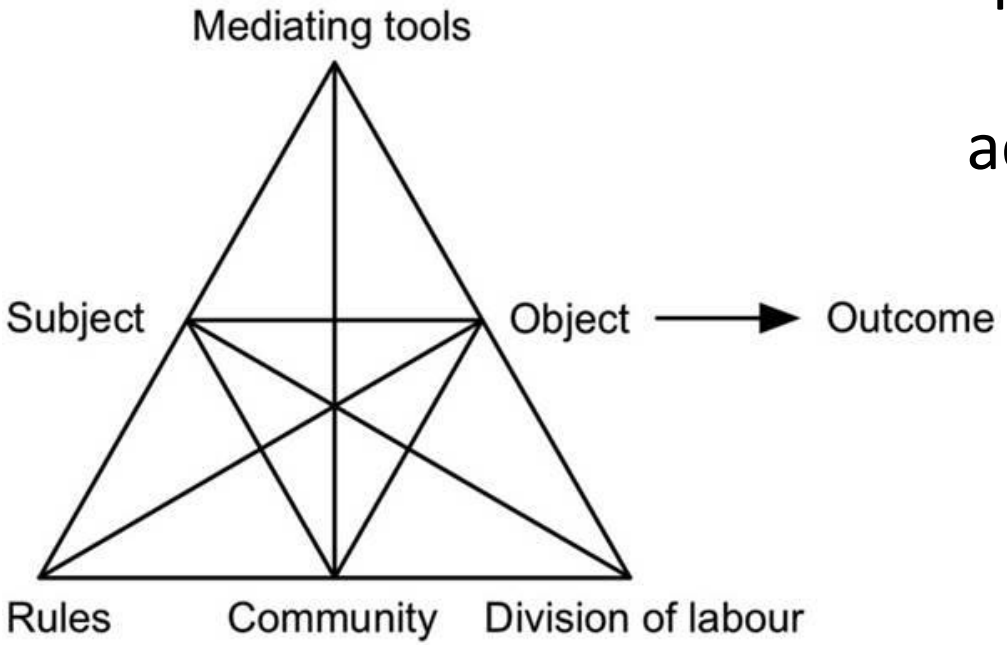
Beach 2003, p. 42

“A transition is *consequential* when it is consciously reflected on, struggled with, and shifts the individual’s sense of self or social position.”

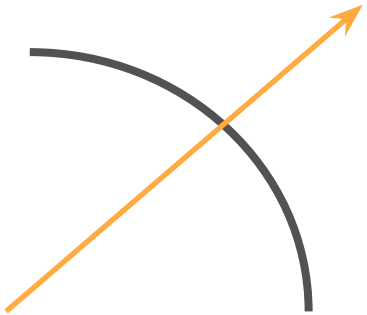
(Beach 2003, p. 42)

Creative Commons – Attribution, Brian Hillegas

Expansive learning crosses activity systems



Engeström 1987; Engeström, Engeström, and Kärkkäinen 1995; Engeström 2007



How might we prepare writers to be boundary-crossers and change agents?

Tuomi-Gröhn, Engeström, and Young; Wenger; Lambert; Bowker and Star

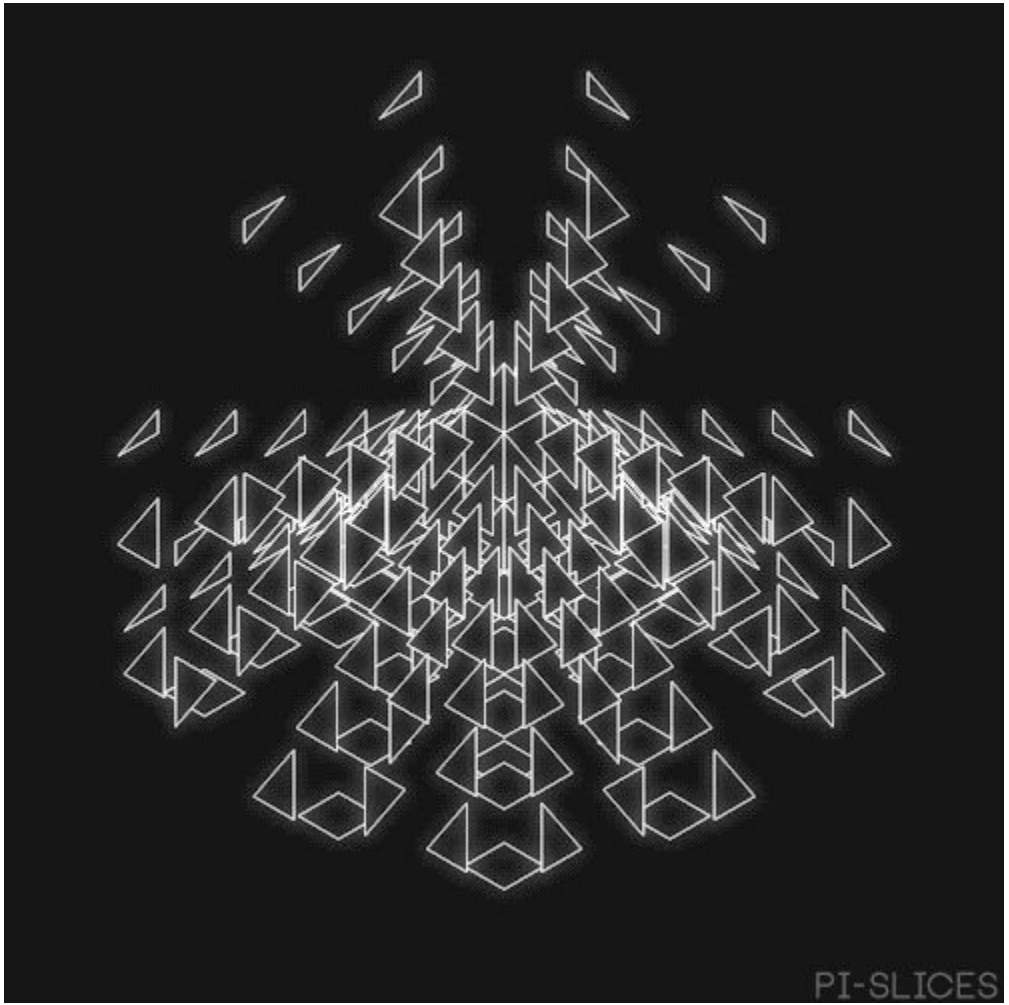
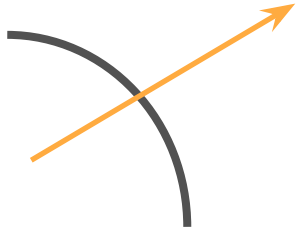


Image Credit:
PI-Slices
http://pislices.ca/

Honor Prior Knowledge, Prior Experiences

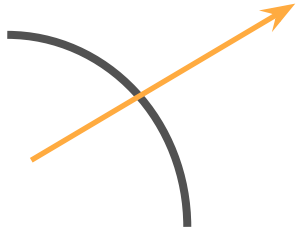


The Prior Matters

How might we prepare writers to be boundary-crossers and change agents?

- high school-to-college
- two-year college to four-year college
- writing in general education to writing in the major
- college to new workplaces, graduate, or professional programs
- curricular to co-curricular or extra-curricular
- informal-to-formal

Focus on the study & practice of rhetorically-based concepts

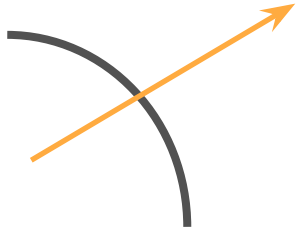


Content Matters

How might we prepare writers to be boundary-crossers and change agents?

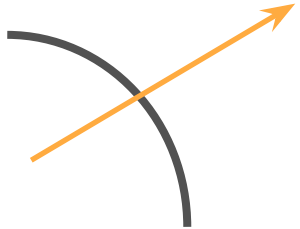
Teach writers to request and act on feedback

Feedback Matters



How might we prepare writers to be boundary-crossers and change agents?

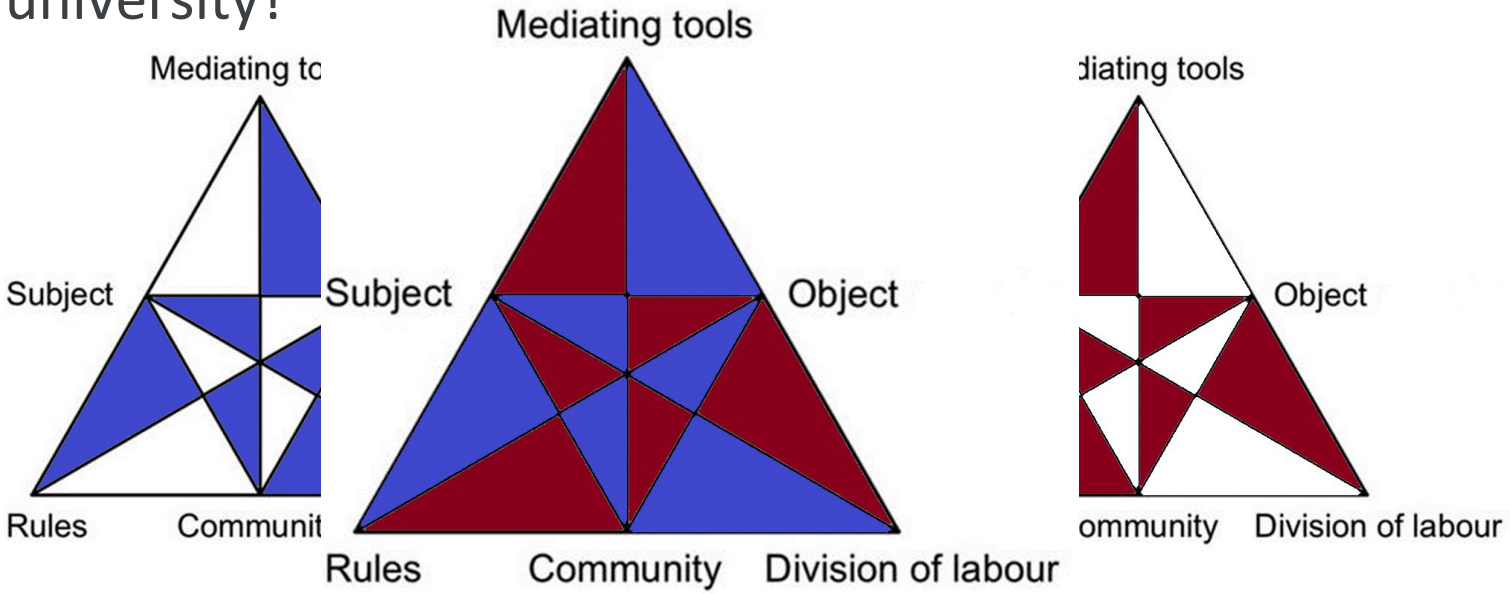
Foster the development of metacognitive awareness



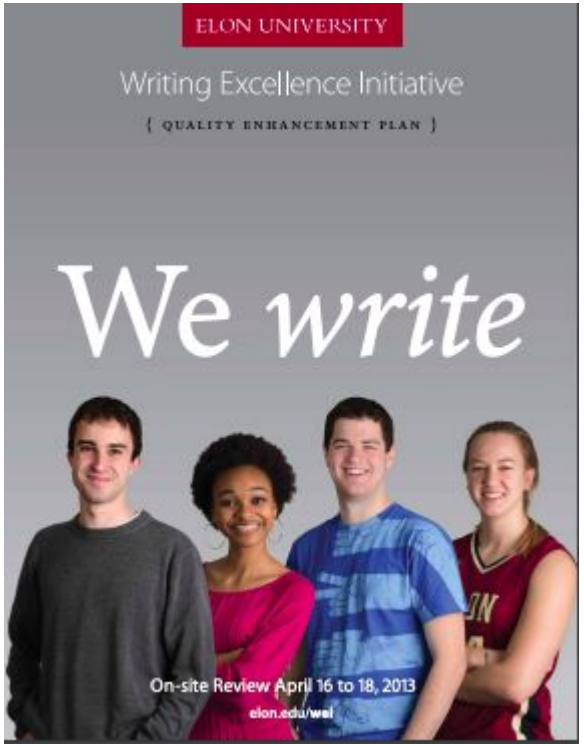
Reflection and Integration Matter

How might we prepare writers to be boundary-crossers and change agents?

What questions does this overview raise for you about the ways your curriculum prepares students for writing beyond the university?



Writing Excellence Initiative QEP (2013-2018)



Writing Excellence Initiative QEP (2013-2018)

- QEP for SACS accreditation
- Goal: By graduation, all students will be prepared to
  - Write in a Discipline / Profession
  - Write as a Citizen
  - Write-to-Learn
- Actors: academic majors, Core curriculum, Student Life, Center for Writing Excellence (WAU & WC)
- Majors, Core, Student Life asked to write at least one Writing Outcome in one of the above areas

Writing Excellence Initiative QEP (2013-2018)

- Mapped writing instruction, pedagogies, genres across the curriculum
- Baseline assessment to identify strengths/weaknesses with new WOs
- Embedded enhanced instruction across at least 3 classes
  - Preferably over multiple years
- Final assessment at the point of graduation
  - End of senior seminar

Writing Excellence Initiative QEP (2013-2018)

- 144 new WOs
  - 76 Writing in a Discipline / Profession WOs
  - 24 Writing as a Citizen WOs
  - 44 Writing-to-Learn WOs
- Assessment of student writing at the 3 points
- Assessment of student writing at the point of graduation
- FSSE assessment
- NSSE assessment
- Faculty culture of writing
- Student culture of writing
- But what about alumni writing? Transfer?

Alumni Study: Pre- and Post-WEI Surveys

- Pre-WEI, older alumni, 2000-2013 graduates, n=513
- Post-WEI, younger alumni, 2014-2018 graduates, n=396
- Goal = distribute same survey, analyze pre- and post-WEI for trends

- Sent in September 2017 (Pre-WEI) and July 2018 (Post-WEI)
- Survey distributed by Alumni Office and signed by university provost, collaborative effort

Alumni Study: The Survey

1. Workplace and Civic/Personal Writing Questions
    a. Types of writing done
    b. Types of writing composed most frequently
    c. Types of writing they spend the most time on
    d. Greatest professional writing challenges
2. Perceptions of Transfer from Elon to Workplace
    a. The extent to which college education prepared them (or failed to prepare them) for the professional writing they now do
    b. Ways that college writing experiences (coursework, co-curricular, gen ed, internships, etc.) helped them most with post-graduation writing
    c. Ways that Elon could have better prepared them for post-graduation writing
3. Writing-to-Learn strategies used (on the job)

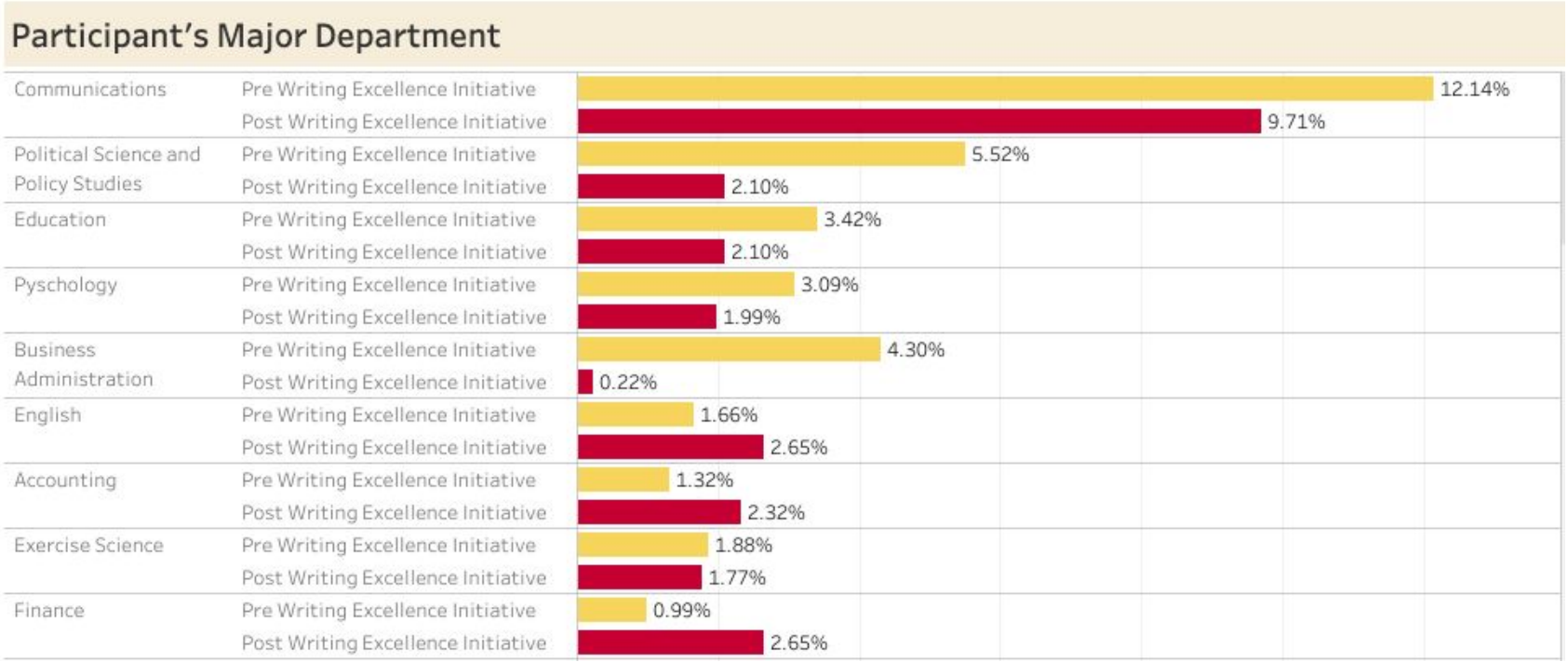
Alumni Study: Demographics

- Graduation year
- Gender and ethnicity
- Geographic location
- Major(s)/minor(s)
- Current and recent job titles

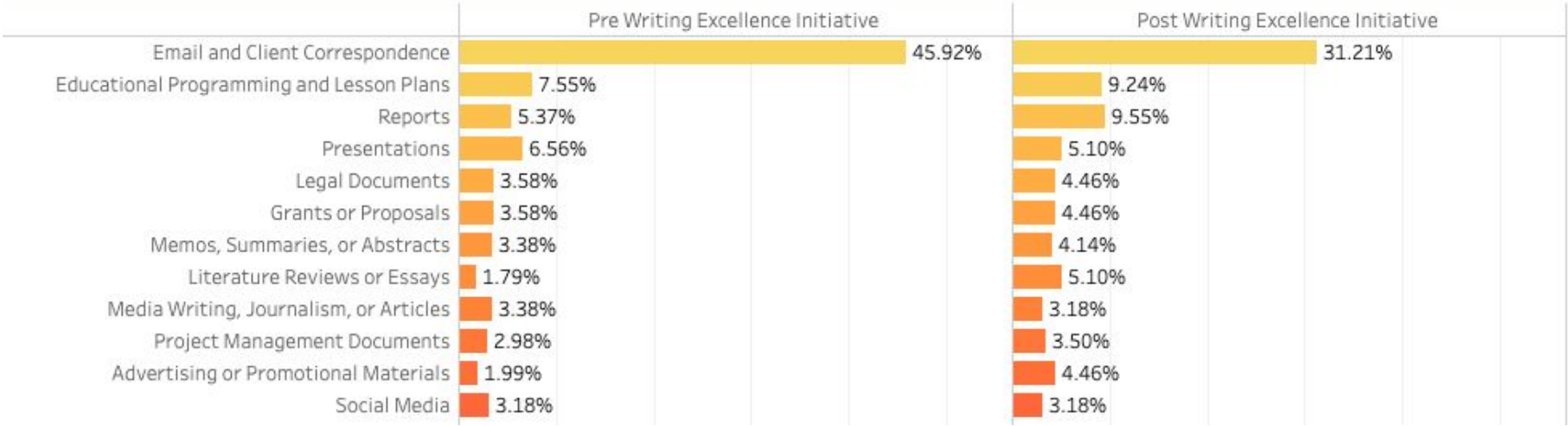
Current Employment Status

	Pre Writing Excellence Initiative	Post Writing Excellence Initiative
Yes	444 94.07%	314 86.98%
No	28 5.93%	47 13.02%

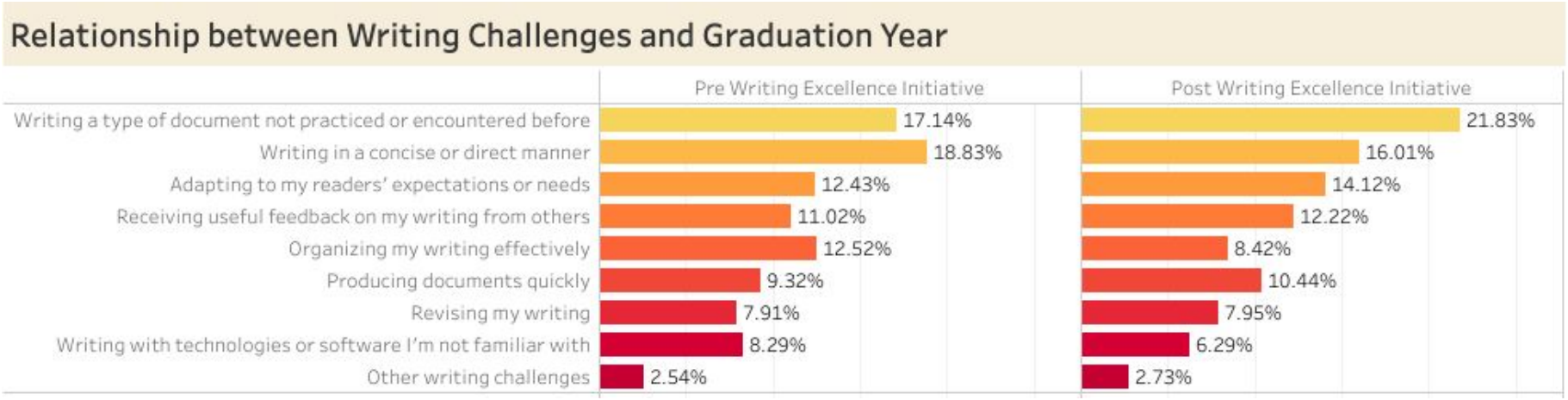
Alumni Study: Majors (top 9)



Relationship between "Writing Most Frequently Composed" and Graduation Year

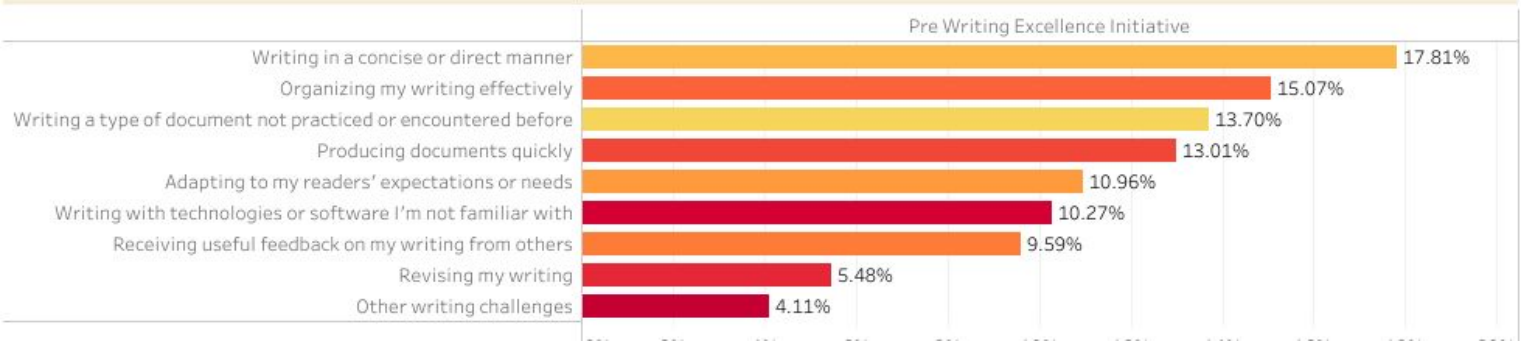


Biggest Self-Reported Professional Writing Challenges

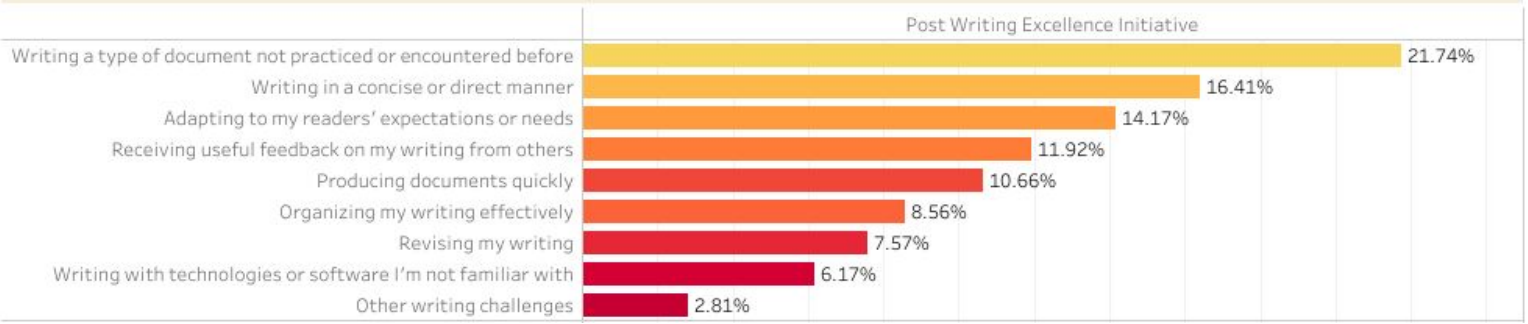


Biggest Self-Reported Professional Writing Challenges

Zoom in: 2000-2002 Alumni



Versus 2015-2018 Alumni

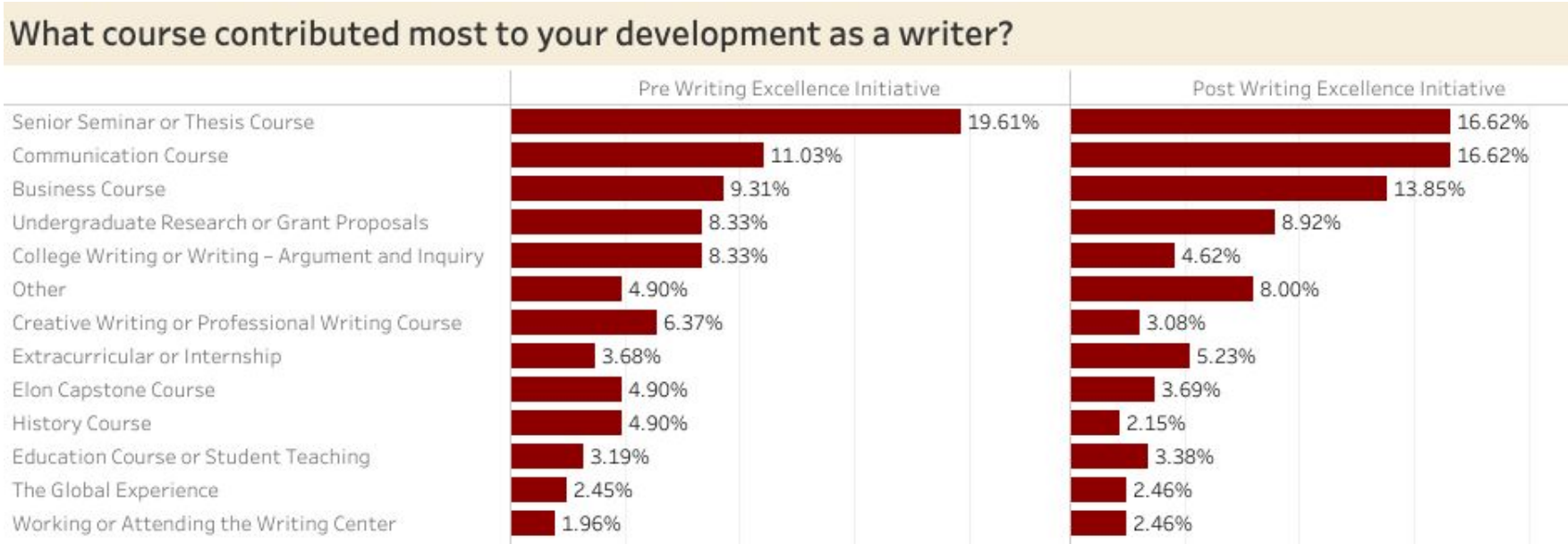


How could Elon have better prepared you?

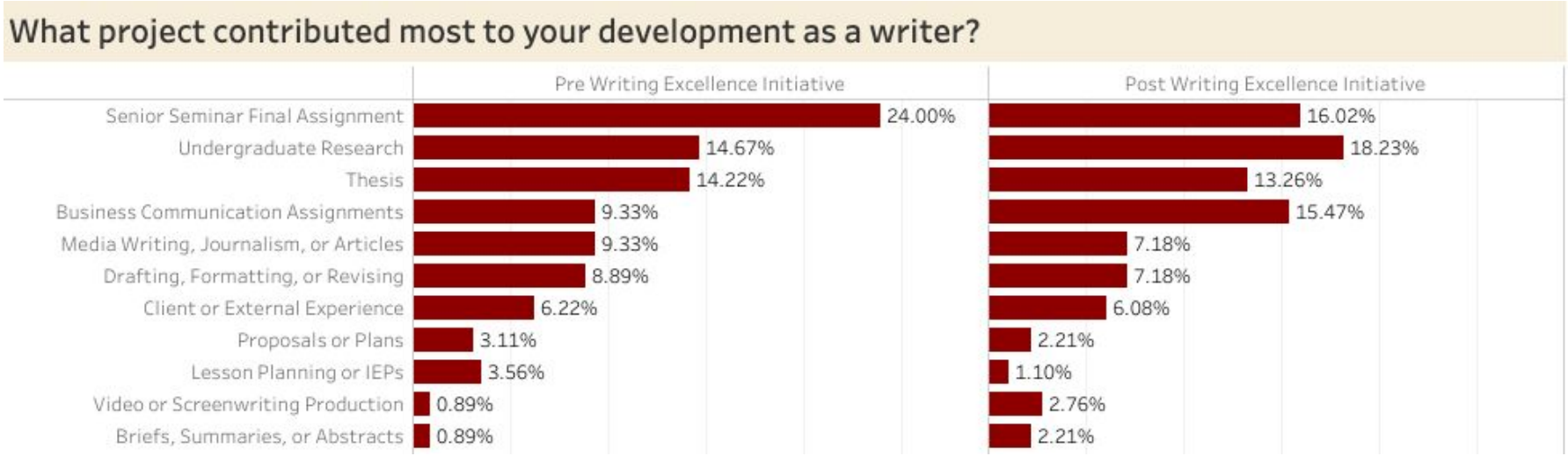
How could Elon have better prepared you for the writing you have done for your job or career since graduating?

Before Introduction of the Writing Excellence Initative	Post Introduction of the Writing Excellence Initative
1. Clarity or brevity	**1.** Clarity or brevity
2. Client or email correspondence	**2.** Client or email correspondence
3. Writing to various audiences	**3.** Writing to various audiences
4. Persuasive proposals	**4.** Storytelling with data and insights
5. Introduce "real life" writing situations specific to the different Elon majors and minors.	**5.** Harder critique on grammar and prose

Academic Experiences that Helped Prepare Alumni



Academic Experiences that Helped Prepare Alumni

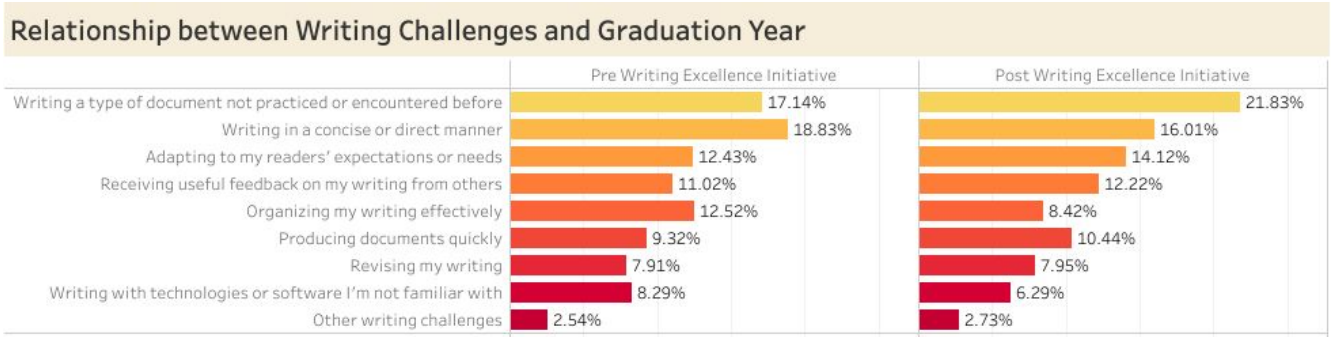


Some (Preliminary) Implications of Alumni Survey

- Can do better addressing most common writing challenges (e.g., type of writing not previously encountered, writing in a concise and direct manner)
- Data helps show faculty what alumni are writing in professional contexts
  - Mismatch b/w common academic genres and workplace writing
  - Value in expanding genres composed across curriculum
- Information for faculty development, Writing Center consultant training
- Value of experiences such as senior seminar and undergraduate research

Alumni Study: Questions for Reflection

- Which institutional partners would be interested in this type of research (inter- and intra-institutional)?
- What do you think is going on behind the scenes to explain the data about challenges?
- Next steps?



What are the opportunities for further research on writing beyond the university?

Individuals and Groups of Writers

- alumni
- employers
- student on-campus employees
- independent students
- life-long learners

Contexts for Writing

- co-curricular or concurrent experiences
- extra-curricular activities or on-campus employment
- self-sponsored/self-motivated writing
- work-integrated learning

Methods

- interviews with employers, esp. alumni employers
- observational case studies
- literacy narratives
- multi-institution/ international collaborations
- cross-disciplinary collaborations

Discussion / Q&A

How might research at your institutions address some of our observations?

www.CenterForEngagedLearning.org

www.elon.edu/wei